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ADVANCING MENTAL HEALTH POLICY & INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

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Senate health committee passes landmark measure to expand early intervention programs for mental health disorders

AB 1315 would create a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership to expand evidence-based models for early detection, prevention and intervention of psychosis and serious mood disorders.

SACRAMENTO, CA – The California Senate Committee on Health passed a landmark measure Wednesday to advance and expand early intervention services for psychosis and serious mood disorders. The bill, AB 1315 by Assemblymember Kevin Mullin, D-South San Francisco, would create a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership, harnessing the power and resources of California's business and technology sector to help transform the paradigm for mental health treatment from one of fail-first crisis care to one that prioritizes early intervention and management of serious illness.

The bill is a top priority for the Steinberg Institute, which is sponsoring the measure as part of its broader effort to ensure brain health is treated with the same urgency and sweep as physical health. The legislation has drawn support from an impressive array of organizations in both the public and private sectors committed to advancing the science surrounding the causes, diagnoses and treatment of mental illness.

Among the industry leaders and nonprofit organizations that have signed on in support: Verily Life Sciences, a Google subsidiary dedicated to medical research; Mindstrong, a mental health research startup co-founded by Tom Insel, former director of the National Institute of Mental Health; One Mind Institute, a fundraising powerhouse for brain health research; The Jed Foundation; Sutter Health; the California Psychiatric Association; the Western Center on Law and Poverty; and the California College of Emergency Room Physicians.

The purpose of AB 1315 is to greatly expand resources for early detection of psychosis and other symptoms of serious mental illness in young people in California, and to respond with evidence-based intervention and treatments that help stem conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression before they become disabling. The research and treatment models for this specialty care exist, and have shown promising outcomes. With appropriate treatment, most young people who

receive these intensive services see a remission in symptoms. They receive treatment and therapy that help them not only to cope, but to thrive.

Throughout California, 24 counties are drawing on funding from the state's historic Mental Health Services Act to offer versions of this program. But across the state, the need for services far outpaces training and capacity.

Darrell Steinberg, who founded the Steinberg Institute and serves as mayor of Sacramento, made a return appearance to the Capitol, where he served as longtime Senate leader, to testify on behalf of the bill. He underscored the need to shift more funding into early intervention services as the only means to ultimately get ahead of the crisis in unmet mental health needs in California.

"In my view, we're never going to catch our own tail" by focusing the bulk of mental health funding on late-stage crisis services, Steinberg said. "The only answer is to help people before that first (psychotic) break... We want to bring these promising, evidence-based practices to scale."

AB 1315 would leverage existing mental health funding by setting up a public-private partnership that provides additional incentive for counties to focus resources on early detection and prevention of mental illness. Specifically, it would create a special account dedicated to funding programs proven to be effective in early detection and treatment. The fund would be fully supported by private donations and federal, state and private grants.

The measure would create an expert advisory committee within the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission that would be charged with developing guidelines for grant-funded programs. The grants would be awarded to counties on a competitive basis; and counties that receive an award would have to provide matching funding.

Brandon Staglin, who serves on the board of directors for One Mind Institute, also was on hand to testify in support of AB 1315. Staglin is a leading advocate for mental health research, who also has lived experience with brain illness. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 18, and with the help of early, comprehensive services, was able to recover.

"I am just one of many whose life has been restored, stronger than ever, thanks to early intervention," Staglin said.

The Senate health committee approved AB 1315 on a bipartisan 7-0 vote. The measure now moves to Senate Appropriations.

The Steinberg Institute is a Sacramento-based nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing sound public policy and inspiring leadership on issues of mental health.

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